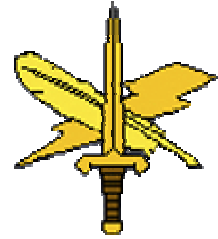




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FEMALE SOLDIERS BREAK NEW GROUND ON TRANSITION TEAMS

By Sgt. Lisa Litchfield
"Dagger" Public Affairs

Two volunteered and two were selected at the branch level, but the end result was the same. Four females in transition team cycle four at Fort Riley became the first females to be placed on a Motor Transport Regiment team.

Master Sgt. Katriana Baker, Delta Company, 101st Forward Support Battalion, volunteered with her branch manager for this mission.

"They [branch] called back. They said, 'Congratulations, you're going on a MiTT team. You're the first female to go.' They kind of told me some things to look out for, what I needed to do to prepare myself to come, as far as weapons training, and stuff to get online. That's how I ended up here," Baker said.

Although she didn't have any worries about the ability to accomplish her mission, Baker said she was glad she wasn't alone.

"I was glad when I saw other females' names on there. Not that I would have had a problem being the only female but it makes things a little easier because then it's not just all eyes focused on me."

Baker had a personal reason for requesting a tour in Iraq: her Soldiers. As a drill sergeant, Baker didn't want to send her Soldiers somewhere she herself hadn't gone.

"It's okay to serve in the garrison environment, but I'm more of a type of a person that I don't want my soldiers to do something that I haven't done. I don't want to tell you 'Hey you go to Iraq, and I'm going to sit here and wait for you. When you get back, you tell me about it.' I want to get out there and do it... then we can sit back and talk about it," she said.

Returning to Iraq for her third tour, but in her first rotation as a transition team member is Capt. Latrice Davis, also with Delta Co., 101st FSB.

Like Baker, Davis isn't concerned about the attention focused on these few female Soldiers as they conduct their training.

"Soldiering is soldiering where I am from. Get out there, find out who your team leaders are going to be, meet your team and come prepared with an open mind and be flexible," she said.

Both Baker and Davis expressed confidence in the training that they had received from the 2nd Brigade, 91st Division (Training Support) trainers and in their team members.

"I'm confident in the training that we've had. My team and I work well together. It's just going to take us getting in there and meeting our unit and making those connections and getting things accomplished," Davis said.

Baker agreed adding that she told herself, "Okay, they're going to teach me what I need to know to be ready to go over there and do this mission. So, I just kind of opened up my mind for whatever they had for me and asked a whole lot of questions."

Teamwork and training were also recognized as steps to success for Baker. "The training I have gotten here has been good so it has built my confidence up. We have a good team. If we say we got it, they step back and let us get it. They don't baby us. They treat us like equals," she said.

Also joining Baker and Davis are Capt. Myrta Crespo and Capt. Chrissy Acojedo, both with Delta Co., 101st FSB. Crespo and Acojedo are both transportation officers who said they were glad to be back to their "roots."

"It's a great feeling to be back in your business," said Crespo. "It's a challenge. It was a challenge when I got here at first, now I feel a whole lot more comfortable, going back to the soldier business and being able to be where you really wanted to be at the beginning."

Acojedo compared the preparation for deploying as part of a transition team to that of a sports team where each person has to find their role and decide what they are going to bring to the team as a whole.

"I feel we have a pretty close knit group. It's like a sports team. I've played sports all my life. Once you first get to know each other, it's a little rough. You go through your rough patches because you don't know who each other are. Once you get into that mode where you gel, that's the most important part of the teamwork aspect and here that's what it is. It's a team," she said.

The fact that so many people seemed interested in the fact that this team was the first with females surprised but didn't bother these Soldiers, they said. They added they were confident that as they showed their abilities the attention would fade and life would return to business as usual.

"I feel that we get a lot of eyes on, a lot of people turn around and look like, man, that's a female. I just know that they gave me a job, and I'm going to do it to the best of my ability," Baker said.

Crespo agreed adding, "Get rid of that fear that we're the first females and we're not going to be welcome. I think we can make the change. I think we can make the difference once we get on the ground. You have to be positive, motivated and looking forward to do that and take the mission."

Although their cultural awareness training and previous deployment experience has shown the Iraqis to be resistant to females, Davis has a plan for that too.

"In the beginning, as females we are sort of sitting back and let our male counterparts pave that road and build the rapport with our unit and then we'll kind of ease our way in so we can do our specific jobs in our element," Davis said.

This is the third tour for Davis, and she knows that history and past performance will have an effect on the mission.

"The fact that we've been over there for the last three years I think that makes it a little bit easier as well because they're used to the American forces there. They know what our culture is like. We know what their culture is like so we're starting to integrate a little bit better. I foresee some problems, but I think they'll mesh out fairly quick," she stated.

Getting ready for her second deployment to theater, Acojedo also had her take on the resistance. "That's just another obstacle that you just need to work on, to overcome so it's something that we're going to face. Yes, we know that, for those of us who have been deployed we already know that. You know, it's something we already experienced so it's not something that we can't handle."

Baker agreed with the assessments Davis and Acojedo had provided and offered her own take on the situation. Although she herself has not been in theater yet, her experience as a drill sergeant has taught her to take a "wait and see" approach to unit integration.

"I think the biggest thing though is once we get there, establishing good rapport. I think once that rapport is established, that although we are female, they'll have a somewhat idea of where we're coming from. They'll begin to build some respect from them for us based on that," she stated.

Professionalism and respect would also go a long way in developing relationships according to Baker. "As long as we're professional and we maintain that professionalism throughout the time that we're dealing with them, I think it'll be a little easier as long as we don't go in demanding so much from them. Even with the males, it just a matter of getting good rapport, establishing, going from there," she said.

The Soldiers all agreed that at the end of the day, it wasn't whether or not you were male or female. It wasn't whether or not you like where you were or what your job was. The important thing was that you accomplished your mission and performed to the best of your ability.

Acojedo summed it up for the team. "The most important thing is that you as an individual must try your 110 percent every day all the time and that's what you have to

focus on. If you let all of the outside things get to you then that 110 percent will go down slowly to 100, to 90, to 75."

She added, "The most important thing is you keep your head in the game and you keep driving on. As long as you do your best that you can do, that's the most important thing."